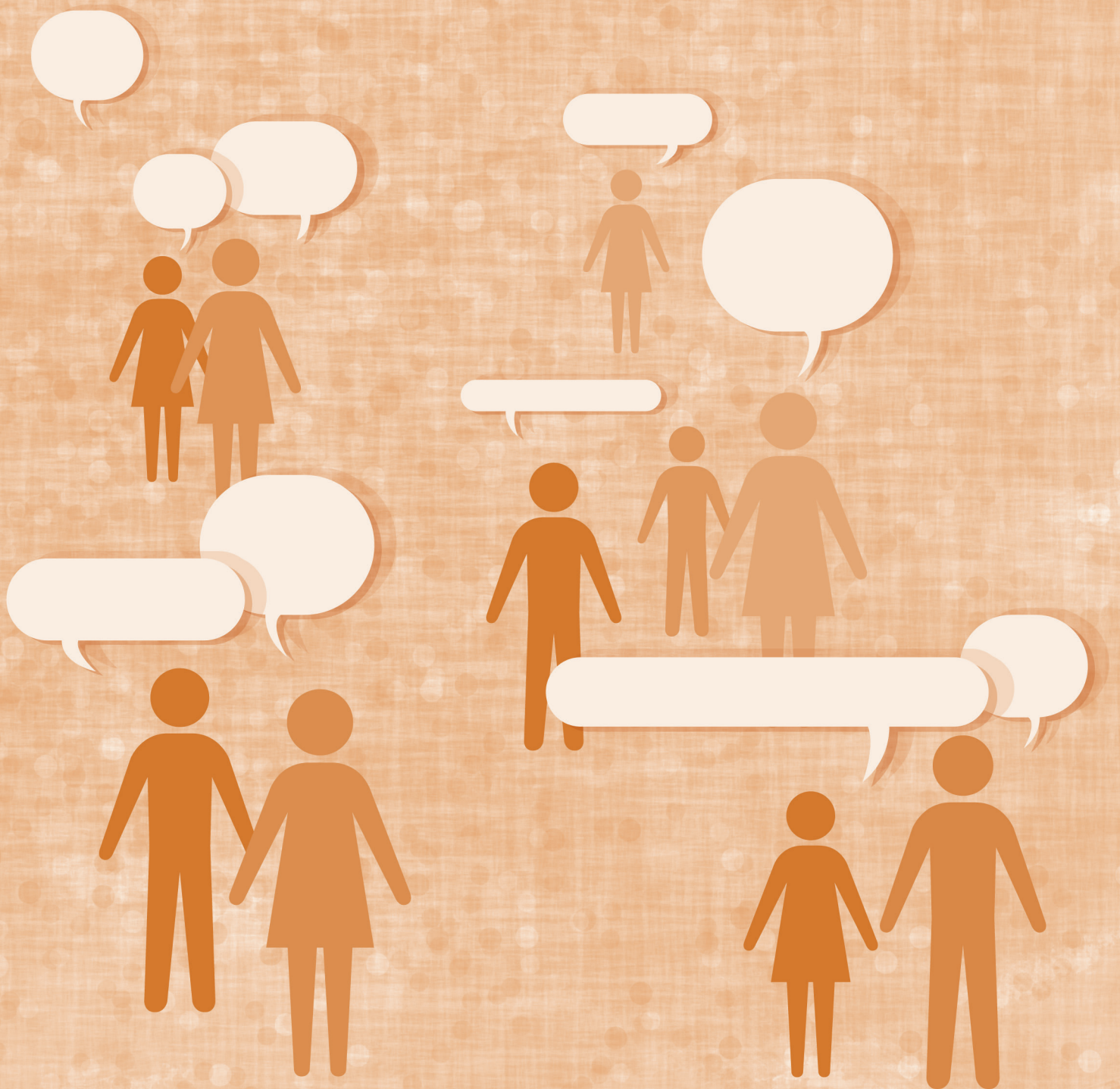


Mediating Complex Conflicts in Africa: Reflections on Multi-Stakeholder Approaches



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Disclaimer: MSN Discussion Points summarize the authors' reflections and do not aim to provide a comprehensive or consensus MSN view.

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MSN Annual Meeting 2023

The Mediation Support Network (MSN) is a global network of primarily non-governmental organizations that support mediation in peace processes. Mediation support refers to activities that assist and improve mediation practices, for example, training activities, developing guidance, carrying out research, working on policy issues, offering consultation, backstopping ongoing mediation processes, networking and engaging with parties.

The MSN's mission is to promote and improve mediation practice, processes and standards to address political tensions and armed conflict. The MSN connects different mediation support units and organizations with the intention of promoting exchange about planned and ongoing activities to enable synergies and cumulative impact; providing opportunities for collaboration, initiating and encouraging joint activities; and sharing analysis of trends and ways to address emerging challenges in the field of peace mediation.

The MSN meetings are organized and hosted by member organizations on a rotating basis. Each meeting has a primary topical focus, which is jointly decided by all network members. In 2023, the member organizations agreed to focus on mediating complex conflicts: multi-stakeholder collaborative approach in a changing world order. The 2023 meeting in Accra, organized by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), marked the 17th annual meeting of the network and was attended by 29 participants representing 20 member organizations (in person), with at least three additional member organizations represented in online attendance.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the African continent has been grappling with complex conflicts with national, regional, and global ramifications. Prominent among them are the violent conflicts in Mali, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Libya. Multi-stakeholder approaches have been widely promoted as an important strategy to mediate and transform conflicts to foster sustainable peace and development. However, there is a dearth of literature that systematically and comprehensively analyzes the nature and scope, as well as the challenges, of an evolving multi-stakeholder approach to peace processes on the continent particularly through a case study lens. To address this knowledge gap, this edition of the Mediation Support Network (MSN) Discussion Points explores the application of multi-stakeholder approaches in mediating complex conflicts in Africa using the conflicts in Mali and Ethiopia as case studies. The two cases were selected because while the multi-stakeholder process in Mali was led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Ethiopian case was African Union (AU)-led. Collectively, the two cases exemplify the importance of a comprehensive, integrated, and structured collaboration for preventive diplomacy and mediation processes at the regional and continental level.

This paper draws on the keynote address and discussions that took place during the MSN annual meeting in Accra, Ghana from 26 April to 28 April, 2023. During the meeting, MSN members exchanged perspectives on the complexities and challenges of contemporary conflicts and the opportunities that exist for multi-stakeholder mediation. The paper further draws on the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)'s past research studies and engagements, as well as secondary sources of data from reports, articles, and web-based publications.

There are four substantive sections of the paper. The first section defines the multi-stakeholder approach and its relevance in the changing security landscape. This is followed by an analysis of how a multi-stakeholder approach to mediation works in practice. Here, the multi-stakeholder mediation processes addressing the conflicts in Mali and Ethiopia are specifically examined to showcase how different stakeholders including international, regional, and national actors work together to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts. The third section looks at the challenges that hinder an effective multi-stakeholder approach in mediating conflicts on the African continent. The final section concludes by highlighting the key issues and providing recommendations to inform mediation practice to transform conflicts in Africa and beyond.

Defining the Multi-Stakeholder Approach

There is no universal definition of a multi-stakeholder approach. Institutions, organizations and scholars have defined the term in a variety of ways, based on their own experiences and understanding. According to the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC), the multi-stakeholder approach is about “convening three or more stakeholders, who together seek solutions and develop strategies around specific conflict prevention and resolution objectives”.¹ This can happen with or without a third party mediator. Furthermore, a dialogue process with more than two actors, but that is not composed of a negotiation over issues, would also fall under the umbrella of “multi-stakeholder” processes but not mediation. Similar definitions can be found in academic scholarship; for example, Groß describes a multi-stakeholder approach as a process that allows for “simultaneous cooperation with political actors (both national and international), civil society and the private sector at all levels (national, regional and local) to resolve a problem”.² Relatedly, Faysse speaks of the multi-stakeholder approach as a “discussion and negotiation process where the stakeholders involved in a problem or a specific issue come together to look for solutions”.³ While the definitions above are all useful in understanding the multi-stakeholder approach, in this paper, we have adopted the definition by GPPAC for reasons of comprehensiveness and relevance.

The multi-stakeholder approach is often led by one stakeholder who is supported by a variety of other stakeholders to prevent and/or resolve conflicts. The lead stakeholder provides the strategic and operational direction for the peace process and often invites the other partners to complement its efforts. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the lead stakeholder may be a state, regional organization, the United Nations (UN), or civil society. For instance, a conflict with regional ramifications in Africa may have the AU or its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the lead stakeholder leading the peace process with the involvement of other critical partners. At the local level, the government and state institutions often lead multi-stakeholder peace processes, with civil society organizations playing a complementary role. Another key feature of the multi-stakeholder approach is that there is often an appointed mediator, envoy or a high level panel made up of eminent persons who are appointed by the lead stakeholder.

1 GPPAC (2017) Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding: A Manual. Available at www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20MSPmanual_Interactive%20version_feb2018.pdf, accessed on 19 August 2023.

2 Groß, L. (2018): Successfully promoting decentralisation: the potential of the multi-stakeholder approach, Briefing Paper, No. 2/2018, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), Bonn. Available at doi.org/10.23661/bp2.2018, accessed on 19 August 2023.

3 Faysse, N. (2006). *Troubles on the Way: An Analysis of the Challenges Faced by Multi-Stakeholder Platforms*. Available at doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-8947.2006.00112.x, accessed on 20 August 2023.

holder in consultation with the others to drive the peace process. All peace mediations are therefore multi-stakeholder processes as soon as they have three or more actors involved, which is the case in the vast majority of mediations. Not all multi-stakeholder processes, however, are mediations, as many do not involve a mediator or focus on negotiating substantive issues. At the same time, there is a large overlap between the ideas behind the term “multi-stakeholder” process and other similar terms such as “inclusivity”, “multi-track processes”, “comprehensive approaches”, “processes fostering national ownership”, “participatory processes”, etc.

According to Schirch, the multi-stakeholder methodology allows for a systems approach to a conflict, where the different actors and their initiatives are approached as part of a bigger whole.⁴ This is why it is often preferred over mediation by just one stakeholder as it allows for more cooperation, coordination, joint solutions, and support among stakeholders in the field of conflict resolution. Unlike some forms of single “one-man” mediation practice “where an accepted and credible third party alone helps two clearly defined parties to find a solution to their dispute that they cannot find by themselves”⁵, the multi-stakeholder approach combines the efforts of many different stakeholders to address conflicts. This helps to bring “together the resources, knowledge, perspectives, skills and constituencies of various the stakeholders”⁶ to mediate and transform a broad range of conflict issues. The goal is for deeply divided conflict parties and relevant stakeholders to work together on common concerns to minimize the costs of conflicts.⁷ While this is the basic assumption of mediation, that seeks to increase participation over time over the course of a negotiation and peace agreement implementation process, it has at times gotten lost by the focus of single “one-man” mediation working under an elite bargaining model. The approach is also valuable for encouraging efforts to synchronize actions, create coherence, and achieve commonality of purpose among different stakeholders. Practically, bringing together various people, before, during, or after a more narrow, formal mediation process, can result in “synergies, political will, collective

capacities, and sense of ownership”⁸ needed to transform conflicts and build sustainable peace.

At the same time, as with all concepts that seek to make peacemaking and peacebuilding work more comprehensive and adaptive to the complexity of conflicts we are currently facing, there are also risks. This includes a tendency to use new terms for old approaches, as well as being unclear of how to put normative ideas into practice. The more comprehensive an approach, the greater the risk of not being clear on what is to be done when, by whom, how, and with what purpose.

In the context of resolving conflicts in Africa, the multi-stakeholder approach has encompassed the combined efforts of the UN, AU, and its RECs such as ECOWAS, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), businesses, and the private sector to mediate conflicts at the community, national, and regional levels with high levels of animosity and mistrust between disputant parties. For the UN and AU/RECs, for instance, the approach has helped them to complement the efforts of each other rather than initiating their own peace processes, giving relevance to the principle of subsidiarity. This kind of systems approach to conflict resolution, where different actors complement each other enhances inclusivity, as well as contributing to broader ownership and coherence of the conflict resolution process.⁹ At the same time, to be effective, additional ideas, such as the subsidiarity principle, are needed to make any comprehensive approach operational.

At the local level, the multi-stakeholder approach usually involves the government, defense and security forces, national infrastructures for peace, CSOs, NGOs, traditional and religious authorities, political parties, local communities, women’s groups, youth groups, academia, and the media. However, the stakeholders might differ from country to country depending on the context and the type of conflict. An effective multi-stakeholder approach at the local level helps to promote the inclusion of marginalized voices, ensures that responses to conflicts are aligned to local concerns and needs, and frequently brings “disconnected actors, sectors, and institutions together in pursuit of a common goal”.¹⁰ Through dialogue and consensus building, it also ensures that the views of all conflict parties are expressed, understood, and taken into consideration in resolving conflicts.¹¹

4 Schirch, L. (2013), *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: Toward a Participatory Approach to Human Security*, First Edition. Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press.

5 African Union (2014). *African Union Mediation Support Handbook*. Durban: ACCORD and African Union; Council of the European Union. (2020). *Concept on EU Peace Mediation*. Available at www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf, accessed on 25 August 2023

6 GPPAC. (2017). *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding: A Manual*. Available at www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20MSPmanual_Interactive%20version_febr2018.pdf, accessed on 19 August 2023; See the “Mediating Complex Conflicts: Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Approach in a Changing World Order” Keynote Address by Mr. Emmanuel Bombande, UN Senior Mediation Adviser, United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

7 Mediators Beyond Borders International (2023). *Finding Common Ground: Collaborative Negotiation and Consensus Building*. Available at www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/conflict-literacy-framework/finding-common-ground.

8 GPPAC. (2017). *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding: A Manual*. Available at www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20MSPmanual_Interactive%20version_febr2018.pdf, accessed on 19 August 2023.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Assanvo, W.T. (n.d). *Multi-stakeholder Diplomacy in the Context of National Diplomatic Systems*. Available at www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/MultistakeholderDiplomacy_Part9.pdf, accessed on 25 August 2023.

If not operationalized well, however, the call for multi-stakeholder, inclusive, or multi-track approaches can lead to inaction, a diffusion of responsibility, a lack of clarity of who does what, or even worse, different third parties working at cross purposes. It is not surprising that the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation argues that:

Joint or co-led mediation initiatives have been used as one way to promote coordination among regional and international organizations. While they have served important political purposes, the results have been mixed. It is generally preferable to have a lead mediator from a single entity based on a strategic partnership and coordination with other mediating entities. The lead has to be established on a case-by-case basis.¹²

The AU and its RECs have established institutional structures to promote the multi-stakeholder approach in resolving conflicts on the continent. These institutional structures which have become collectively known as mediation support units (MSUs) are governed by a range of mandates and normative frameworks.¹³ The effectiveness of the MSU lies in the promotion of inclusive processes and consensus building among stakeholders to support mediation efforts. In June 2015 for instance, ECOWAS established the Mediation Facilitation Division (MFD) to backstop mediation efforts undertaken by its mediation organs, member states, non-state actors, and created joint initiatives with other international organizations such as the AU and UN.¹⁴ The MFD ensures a coordinated approach to mediation within the ECOWAS Commission and its institutions, as well as with its partners although this has not always been the case operationally. In the next section, the paper examines how the multi-stakeholder approach has been operationalized or implemented in practice at the regional level by the AU and ECOWAS using Mali and Ethiopia as case studies.

The Multi-Stakeholder Approach in Practice

The ECOWAS and the AU-led mediation efforts in the political crises in Mali and Ethiopia are specific cases of a multi-stakeholder approach to mediation in Africa. The two cases showcase the significance of a comprehensive, integrated, and structured collaboration for preventive diplomacy and mediation processes at the regional and continental level. The multi-state nature of the mediation processes created spaces for inclusive participation and constructive collaboration among critical stakeholders, which facilitated transitional processes and peace agreements. It is thus important to shed light on how the multi-stakeholders' collaborative approaches were organized in these two cases.

Case Study of Mali

Context of the Malian conflict

Amid growing insecurity, Mali witnessed a military coup on 18 August 2020 that toppled the elected government of President Ibrahim Boubakar Keita after months of anti-government citizens' protests against allegations of corruption and the government's ineptitude in addressing a myriad of socio-economic challenges facing the population.¹⁵ There were also widespread concerns about the inability of the government to abate the rising insecurity unleashed by a host of armed non-state actors operating in the country. Eight months after the military takeover, "the leadership of the Transitional Government headed by interim President Bah N'Daw was overthrown by the military leadership of Colonel Assimi Goïta in another military coup on 24 May 2021."¹⁶ The military forays in the governance of the country stymied political stability and aggravated uncertainties and human insecurity. In response, ECOWAS initiated a multi-stakeholder collaborative mediation to engage critical actors to mediate the Malian political crisis. While the multi-stakeholder engagement commenced in August 2020, its conclusion remains uncertain due to new unfolding developments.

Nature of the multi-stakeholder mediation process

The ECOWAS-led mediation in Mali is reflected in the constructive engagement of actors at the national, regional, continental, and international levels. At the national level, the ECOWAS High-Level Mediation Team, led by former President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria, engaged various national actors through inclusive national dialogues on the political process and

12 United Nations (2012). United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation. Available at peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_o.pdf, accessed on 15 February 2024.

13 For more Information See Mason, S.J. A. and Mpeiwa, M. (2023). The Role of Mediation Support Structures. No. 331, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*.

14 Odigie, B. (2016). The institutionalisation of mediation support within the ECOWAS Commission. *ACCORD Policy and practice Brief*; Odigie, B. (2023). Mediating Peace in Africa: Perspectives from The Economic Community of West African States. *ACCORD Monograph Series* 1/2023.

15 WANEP. (2021). *The Limits and Pitfalls of Multilateral Regional and National Responses to the Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel and Cote d'Ivoire*. Accra: WANEP.

16 WANEP. (2023). West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2023: Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region. Available at www.wanep.org/wanep/west-africa-early-warning-outlook-2023-potential-flashpoints-and-simmering-conflicts-in-the-region, accessed on 20 August 2023.

transitional timeframe aimed at restoring democratic governance and political stability in Mali. The mediation included a series of engagements with the Transitional Government (TG) headed by Assimi Goïta, Prime Minister Choguel Maiga, political parties, CSOs, religious leaders, women and youth networks, and the 5 June Movement-Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) in an inclusive national dialogue on ways forward to transition to civilian rule.¹⁷ A key sticking point was the disagreement between the ECOWAS mediation team and the TG over the length of the transitional period. ECOWAS disagreed with the TG's initial proposal of a five-year transitional period. Nonetheless, through the multi-stakeholder engagement with critical actors, the parties accepted a two-year transitional timetable, which included drafting a national constitution, organizing a referendum on the constitution, adopting electoral laws, and holding national elections to facilitate a political transition.

Regarding coordination with regional and continental actors, ECOWAS collaborated with the AU and diplomatic missions in Mali as part of a multi-stakeholder collaborative engagement. The collective engagements of the ECOWAS mediation team, the AU mediation and other diplomatic missions with the Malian TG prevented a duplication of efforts. It further facilitated synergies and coordination in the efforts of these actors in providing the needed support and capacity to the ECOWAS mediation team to effectively engage the internal political actors to agree on a transitional timeframe. Specifically, the AU and the diplomatic missions provided technical support to youth and women's groups, faith-based organizations, and CSOs to enhance their capacity to participate in inclusive national dialogue and the mediation process. Such support created a space for inclusive participation of these critical stakeholders in the mediation and dialogue process about the political future of the country.

Regarding international level engagement, the ECOWAS mediation team leveraged the influence of international partners, including the UN, European Union (EU) and United States' envoys in Mali to ensure complementarity in the mediation and political processes. The UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the UN's country team, for instance, "organized training sessions for civil society organizations involved in election awareness-raising and mobilization."¹⁸ MINUSMA also "coordinated the transportation of the delegates and electoral materials to facilitate the same exercises in the central and northern parts of the country."¹⁹ Likewise, the EU provided resources and technical support to traditional leaders in dispute management, and to youth and women's organizations to enhance their capacity to participate

in the national dialogue, mediation, and political processes. However, the frayed relations between the TG and MINUSMA led the former to issue a communiqué on 16 June 2023 to demand the withdrawal of the latter from Mali. Consequently, on 30 June 2023, the "United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2690 effectively terminated MINUSMA's mandate and requested its withdrawal by 31 December 2023."²⁰ While the exit of MINUSMA is not as a direct consequence of the failure of the multi-stakeholder mediation effort in Mali, it has created a security vacuum and gaps in its role of strengthening CSOs' inclusive participation in political processes in the country. Also, in spite of its exit, the UN remains a crucial actor in the governance, peace, and security ecosystem of Mali. In this respect, it will still be playing a crucial role through engagements with the Malian Government and ECOWAS's multi-stakeholder mediation efforts. Thus this makes the multi-stakeholder approach to mediation in Mali still relevant.

Another key element of the multi-stakeholder mediation process in Mali is evident in the establishment of two separate multi-stakeholder monitoring groups – both national and international – to monitor the transitional process in line with the timeframe and provision of technical support to the political process. While the National Monitoring Group consists of stakeholders including representatives of the TG, political parties, CSOs, women and youth groups, traditional and religious groups, ECOWAS's International Monitoring Group involves experts drawn from the AU, EU, UN, and other international partners to provide the necessary technical support to monitor the transitional process. Additionally, the establishment of a 15-board member, Independent Authority for Election Management, which includes eight members nominated by the government, four by political parties and three by CSOs, is a further reflection of the multi-stakeholder collaborative approach to the mediation process. Notably, "four representatives are women, representing 26 per cent of the total, falling just under the national law requiring 30 per cent."²¹ While the various actors have specific roles in the national and international monitoring groups established to monitor the transitional process, ECOWAS coordinates their activities in line with the Transitional Charter.

Despite the efforts toward transition to constitutional rule in Mali, "the military government postponed the presidential elections scheduled for February 2024 to return the country to democratic governance, citing rising insecurity and other technical reasons."²² This has led to concerns and perceptions among other stake-

17 The 5 June Movement – Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5 – REP) is a diverse coalition of opposition groups, religious leaders, and civil society organisation representatives that organised series of protests that led to the overthrow of former President Boubacar Keita in Mali.

18 United Nation Security Council (2023). Situation in Mali. Report of the Secretary-General. S/2023/21. 6 January 2023.

19 Ibid.

20 UN News (2023). Last UN peacekeepers poised for complete withdrawal Mali. *Global perspective of Human stories*. Available at: news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145207, accessed on 14 February 2024

21 Ibid.

22 VOA (2023). Mali's Military Government Postponed Presidential Elections Intended to Restore Civilian Rule. Published on 25 September, 2023. Available at: www.voanews.com/a/mali-s-military-government-postpones-presidential-election-intended-to-restore-civilian-rule-/7283436.html, accessed on 31 October 2023.

holders, especially ECOWAS, international actors, and some CSOs in Mali, that the TG is exploiting the security deterioration in the country as justification for prolonging their stay in power. It is also symptomatic of the lack of commitment on the part of the TG toward the efforts to return the country to constitutional rule, and of the deficits of trust among the actors. This poses significant challenges to the ECOWAS-led mediation effort, the transitional process, and prospects for democratic governance restoration in Mali.

Although the case of Mali is yet to yield fruits owing to the fluid political situation and current impasse between the TG and ECOWAS, which is evident in the withdrawal of the three central Sahel states – Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso – from the regional economic community, it has made considerable contributions to the current state of the country. The multi-stakeholder approach to mediation, for instance, led to the establishment of the TG and Transitional Plan for return to constitutional rule. Moreover, it has led to the adoption of a new constitution through a national referendum held on 18 June 2023. This has paved the way for other processes to be undertaken as part of the broader preparations for the organization of the presidential elections which are envisaged to be held in February 2024 to restore civilian rule.

Case Study of Ethiopia

Context of the Ethiopian conflict

The intra-state conflict between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was triggered by several factors. It is also reflective of the deeper tensions between a centralized vs a decentralized vision for the future of the country. The immediate causes included the diminishing power of the TPLF, the dissolution of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to form the Prosperity Party, and the disagreements over the postponement of the scheduled elections in August 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tensions further increased when the TPLF ran elections in September 2020 in the Tigray region, in defiance of the federal government's decision. Consequently, the attack on the federal military base in the Tigray region in November 2020 by Tigrayan forces triggered an outbreak of armed conflict between the federal government forces and the TPLF, which lasted for two years. In November 2022, an AU-led multi-stakeholder mediation effort facilitated a peace agreement in Pretoria, South Africa between the representatives of the two protagonists. Many analysts, however, see it as an "asymmetric agreement in favor of the central Ethiopian government, and thus no guarantee of a sustainable end to conflict."²³

Nature of the multi-stakeholder mediation process

A key component of a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach in the AU-led mediation efforts was the use of multiple mediators, which comprised of the AU High-Representative to the Horn, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo who was appointed in August 2021, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and former South African Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo. It is worth noting that the "involvement of Kenyatta in the mediation process helped avert a key concern flagged by the TPLF over the 'proximity' of Obasanjo to the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed."²⁴ This earned the trust, confidence, and willingness of the TPLF to participate in the mediation process. Importantly, the engagement of multiple mediators in the mediation process also created interactions and complementarity in the efforts of the regional economic bloc, IGAD, and the AU as a continental body, and ensured synergies in mediation efforts.

Like the Malian case, the AU High-Representative for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, collaborated with international actors including the US, EU, and the UN envoys to the region and engaged in shuttle diplomacy to bring the parties to the negotiation table. A coordinated diplomatic engagement with the parties to address key sticking points resulted in a humanitarian truce between March and August 2022 to allow aid delivery to the Tigrayan population, who were in dire need of humanitarian support including food and medicines. This provided gradual momentum for the AU to strengthen engagements with IGAD and allowed external partners (the US, the EU, and the UN) to play a complementary role to intensify diplomatic pressure and dialogue with the parties, which culminated in a peace agreement in Pretoria. Notably, the multi-stakeholder mediation process was mainly funded by the AU through the Crisis Reserve Facility embedded in the African Peace Fund. The parties agreed to key points including:

- the cessation of all forms of hostilities, including an end to the use of belligerent rhetoric and hate speech;
- disarmament of TPLF combatants and subsequent steps toward the implementation of a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program;
- restoration of essential services in the Tigray region;
- ensuring unfettered access for humanitarian aid in the Tigray region; and

²³ Crisis Group. (2024). The Red Sea and the Horn | Crisis Group. www.crisis-group.org/africa/red-sea-and-horn, accessed on 15 February 2024.

²⁴ Abebe, Z. B. (2022). The Role of African Union in the Mediation Process in Ethiopia. *Conflict and Resilience Monitor. ACCORD*. September 22, 2022. Available at www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-role-of-the-african-union-in-the-mediation-process-in-ethiopia, accessed on 30 August 2023.

- upholding a commitment to protect civilians, especially women and children.²⁵

A further application of the multi-stakeholder approach to the mediation is evident in the establishment of an inclusive monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanism comprised of an AU high-level panel, representatives of IGAD, and the Ethiopian parties to manage the implementation of the peace agreement process. Nonetheless, nuanced reflections reveal that despite its noble intentions, the process has been an elite-dominated multi-stakeholder mediation effort. Thus, in reality, inclusive participation of local community actors and influencers, as well as the voices of people devastated by the conflict in the peace process are palpably negligible. This undermines the effectiveness of the multi-stakeholder approach to mediation in Ethiopia in terms of its capacity to create space for inclusive participation of people in the monitoring and implementation processes of the peace agreements. This hinders trust and confidence of key actors including local community actors and the people affected by the conflict in Ethiopia.

Key Successes and Lessons

It is worth noting that the ECOWAS-led multi-stakeholder mediation process in Mali was a post-coup peace-building effort which aimed at restoring constitutional democratic order, while that of the AU-led mediation in Ethiopia was responding to a civil war and aimed at restoring peace and stability in the country. In both cases, there are two key success factors that are worth exploring based on the multi-stakeholder mediation process.

The first success factor is the desire of the AU and ECOWAS to take ownership, leadership, and ensure sustained commitment to the peace processes in both Mali and Ethiopia. Increasingly, external actors are “being viewed with reluctance by national actors for a range of reasons, including sovereignty, historical reasons and perceptions linked to impartiality.”²⁶ Importantly, although AU and ECOWAS’s peace and security interventions are largely funded by external actors, both processes were mainly funded by the AU and ECOWAS, which further provided leverage for them to own the Ethiopia and Mali multi-stakeholder peace processes. Therefore, although the AU and ECOWAS leveraged the influence of external actors including the UN, EU, and US to support the multi-stakeholder mediation, their lead role in the peace process contributed immensely to its relatively successful outcome. In the case of Mali, for example, the strategic influence, and past experiences

of ECOWAS in mediating complex conflicts in countries such as Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau, as well as its comparative advantage of having a better understanding of the socio-cultural and political nuances of the crisis in Mali, contributed to the positive outcome of the mediation. As underscored earlier, although the situation in Mali is evolving and thus remains inconclusive, its appreciable success is evident in the establishment of a transitional government and a transitional plan, and holding a constitutional referendum which will lead to presidential elections facilitating transition to constitutional rule.

Similarly, the AU succeeded in Ethiopia because it was better positioned and had the political legitimacy as the continental organization to serve as the lead responder to the crisis, given its understanding and proximity to the conflict theater. Although the implementation of the peace agreement remains inconclusive, the success attained through the multi-stakeholder mediation approach is mirrored in its capacity to bring the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF to dialogue, which led to the signing of the Peace Agreement in Pretoria. This has further contributed to a cessation of fire and hostilities between the warring factions and opened the access to humanitarian corridors to support populations devastated by the conflict. In sum, the strong comparative advantages of both the AU and ECOWAS in promoting peace and security in their neighborhoods contributed to the effective outcome of the multi-stakeholder mediation processes in Mali and Ethiopia. ECOWAS has been a key player in mediating conflicts and peacebuilding in the West African region. This is reflected in its development and activation of various peace and security frameworks and interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and The Gambia, among others in the region. In view of this, it has demonstrated capacity and a track record in addressing political crises and threats to security in the region. This thus gives it some clout to respond to the Malian political crisis. While this holds true of IGAD and its role in addressing peace and security challenges in the eastern African region, the proximity of the AU to the Ethiopian conflict, however, necessitated its lead role in the multi-stakeholder mediation effort.

The second success factor is the external support for African ownership and priority setting in responding to the crises in Mali and Ethiopia. The two cases underscore the “importance of external actors (multilateral and bilateral partners) supporting and promoting African ownership and priority setting on issues impinging on peace and security on the continent.”²⁷ Although the involvement of some external actors in some contexts has been perceived as that of spoilers, their influence and impact on peace mediation across the continent cannot be shunned, or put at the periphery of Africa’s peace and security conversations. The cases we out-

25 African Union (2022). Joint Statement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Available at: www.peaceau.org/uploads/joint-statement-gov-fdre-tplf-11-02-2022-19-38-33.pdf, accessed on 31 October 2023.

26 Spidler, K. (2020). UNAMID: The Legitimation of Global-Regional Peacekeeping Cooperation, Partnership and Friction in UN-AU Relations. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*. Vol. 14. Issue 5: Governance and Security. March 6. Pp. 187–203.

27 Coleman, K. P., and Job, B. L. (2021). How Africa and China may shape UN peacekeeping beyond the liberal international order. *International Affairs*, Vol. 19. Pp. 1451–1468.

lined show that respect for African leadership by external actors is relevant to achieve peaceful outcomes of mediation processes in the spirit of strategic partnerships to foster coherence, shared interests, and limit competition. External actors, admittedly, have played an important role in providing funding to support peace and security interventions in Africa. Nonetheless, they are also, in many ways, spoilers of peace efforts owing to their geostrategic interests in countries across the continent. Thus, bringing such actors to the table of mediation is important in providing leverage to address their concerns and interests in the multi-stakeholder process.

Beyond the success factors, one of the critical lessons that can be drawn from the two cases is the commitment of the conflict parties to the multi-stakeholder peace processes to end the crises as well as the acceptance of the leadership role of the AU and ECOWAS to help reach a negotiated settlement. It is instructive to note that peace is a process, which requires a significant commitment by the conflicting parties for it to be achieved. The acceptance by the military junta in Mali of ECOWAS's mediation role and that of the AU by the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF was the first step that facilitated the successful peace talks in both contexts. Without the commitment and acceptance of the parties, the AU and ECOWAS can work in vain with limited/no success.

Challenges of Multi-Stakeholder Approaches

Despite the successes of multi-stakeholder peace processes, there are challenges and pitfalls that hinder its effectiveness in addressing conflicts on the continent. This section discusses some of these challenges.

1. Lack of Trust

Trust-building remains a key principle in a multi-stakeholder approach to peace processes as it can hinder constructive communication and information sharing. If there is a lack of trust, having more third parties can sometimes help if their roles and coordination is clear. This is what contrasts a multi-stakeholder mediation approach from an elite bargaining single mediation approach. The trust between and among the third parties helping to resolve conflicts and the conflict parties must become stronger over time for the process to be successful. Third parties are also expected to represent the interests of all feuding parties to win their trust. Where the parties lack trust in any of the stakeholders, the prospects for the peaceful resolution of conflicts are often undermined. Trust issues continue to obstruct a successful multi-stakeholder approach to peace processes on the continent. In Ethiopia, for example, both the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF

had mistrust for some stakeholders involved in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. While the TPLF was highly critical of the AU-led mediation efforts due its perceived partiality, the Federal Government of Ethiopia described the Western countries involved in the peace process as backers of the TPLF.²⁸ As a result, although the Federal Government of Ethiopia insisted on a process mediated by the AU's Horn of Africa Envoy, former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, the TPLF rejected him as too close to the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.²⁹ The TPLF rather called for talks to be held in Nairobi, overseen by Kenya and the United States. Consequently, the AU had to form a high-level panel which comprised Olusegun Obasanjo, Uhuru Kenyatta, and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to mediate the crisis. A peace agreement was subsequently signed by the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF in Pretoria in November 2022 to end the war after intense shuttle diplomacy by the high-level panel and other relevant third parties.³⁰

2. Inclusivity of Peace Processes

Inclusivity in multi-stakeholder peace processes remains inadequate as key actors such as CSOs, women, and youth continue to be excluded or not meaningfully engaged.³¹ In some instances where youth and women are included in peace processes, they are not often brought on board in a systematic and structured way with the aim of strengthening the mediation process and outcomes. For example, while the multi-stakeholder peace process in Mali created spaces for inclusive participation of other critical agents, including women and youth groups and the June 5 Movement (M5-RFP), which was a loose coalition of opposition groups, religious leaders, traditional authorities, and civil society actors, the case of Ethiopia was largely dominated by engagements of regional, continental, and international actors – AU, IGAD, US, EU, and UN – and the federal government and the TPLF at the national level, with a marked absence of women. This, to a more considerable extent, was due to the contextual dynamics of conflicts in the two countries – civil ethnic war in Ethiopia and military takeover in Mali. CSOs, youth, and women's participation in the Ethiopian peace process was largely constrained. This is partly because the country has been one of the most repressive environments for civic activism despite the repeal of the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation in 2019, which had forbidden CSOs from engaging in human rights, governance,

²⁸ Aljazeera (2022) What stagnated the Ethiopia peace process? Available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/18/what-stagnated-the-ethiopia-peace-process, accessed on 1 September 2023.

²⁹ Reda, G. (2022). Ethiopia: The African Union cannot deliver peace to Tigray. Available at www.theafricareport.com/234090/ethiopia-the-african-union-cannot-deliver-peace-to-tigray, accessed on 30 September 2023.

³⁰ The New Humanitarian (2022). Is there a path to peace in the Tigray conflict? Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/09/28/Ethiopia-Tigray-Amhara-blockade-AU-Obasanjo, accessed on 1 September 2023.

³¹ Eze, B. C. (2019). Mediating Complex Community Conflicts in Africa: Connecting Research to Peacebuilding. *African Peacebuilding Network APN Lecture Series: No. 5*.

or advocacy activities.³² A meeting of 35 local CSOs calling for a truce in August 2022 was for instance blocked by security forces and some journalists were locked up for questioning the utility of the war.³³ This undermined the possibility for constructive contributions and perspectives of CSOs in the final agreement that was signed in South Africa.

In the case of Mali, although opportunities existed for the inclusive participation of all critical actors, M5-RFP rejected the Transition Charter proposed by the military. The group indicated that the Charter was not consistent with the outcome of the deliberations because it failed to recognize the coalition's role and disregarded "the majority choice of a transition led by a civilian President".³⁴ This highlights that a process can be inclusive and yet fall short of representing the different views and sections of society. Therefore, "while the need to balance inclusivity against efficiency in a peace process is important, inclusivity should not be superficial or merely symbolic".³⁵ As indicated by Limo, ensuring an inclusive process with the effective participation of all actors is vital to strengthen the ownership, effectiveness, quality, sustainability, and implementation of peace agreements.³⁶

3. Effects of Geopolitical Rivalries

Increasing geopolitical rivalries and competition among the major powers have negative consequences on prospects for effective multi-stakeholder mediation efforts on the continent. This development is impeding international consensus, cooperation, and the support needed to address conflicts in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Sudan. In this spirit, the keynote speaker during the 2023 MSN annual meeting in Accra, Ghana, Mr. Emmanuel Bombande noted that *"The geopolitical competition is endangering disunity in the UN Security Council among the Five (5) Permanent Members with the risk that key decisions to promote peace and stability in Africa are blocked by some members through the exercise of their veto right"*.³⁷

A typical example is how Russia vetoed the Security Council resolution drafted by France and the United

Arab Emirates to extend the UN sanctions in Mali and independent monitoring³⁸ for another year in August 2023.³⁹ This development pointed to the fact that the multi-stakeholder interests in conflicts such as these make them more difficult to resolve, making efforts at cooperation and coordination harder, but also more needed. A bigger problem, however, may be the rift between the Malian authorities and their main traditional Western partners, particularly France, and how this impedes peace efforts in the country. Since the coup in 2020, the country's relationship with Western partners has deteriorated, particularly with the arrival of Russian Wagner mercenaries. In this regard, Mali quickly became embroiled in the rivalry between the West and Russia. Its relationship with MINUSMA, which is assisting in the implementation of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, has also weakened due to the geopolitical rivalries.⁴⁰ In June 2023, France prepared a new draft resolution to end the Mission by 31 December 2023 after the Malian authorities called for its withdrawal without delay.⁴¹ These developments have reduced Western support and cooperation for the peace processes in the country.

These dynamics are increasingly visible in other contexts across Africa. In Sudan, for example, the deep involvement and entanglement of regional actors including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Israel is understood to have exacerbated the crisis that has been ongoing since April 2023.⁴² The competing agendas and conflicting interests of these actors have significantly thwarted efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict. The conflict in Sudan is similarly placing the country at the center of divisive geopolitical disputes between Russia and the West as both compete for influence and strategic interests.

4. Funding Constraints of AU and its RECs

In Africa, most multi-stakeholder peace processes are led by the AU and RECs with the support of the UN and other external partners like the EU, US, France, Germany, Denmark, and Norway. They are mainly funded by the annual and voluntary contributions from member

32 Sidelinger, B. and Baranowski, R. (2020). Despite Challenges, Ethiopia's Civil Society Remains Committed to Democracy. Available at www.iri.org/news/despite-challenges-ethiopias-civil-society-remains-committed-to-democracy, accessed on 2 September 2023.

33 Addis Standard. (2022). News: Despite ban on meeting press, local CSOs call for immediate peace in Ethiopia, basic services provision in Tigray, other conflict hit areas. www.addisstandard.com/news-despite-ban-on-meeting-press-local-csos-call-for-, accessed on 2 September 2023.

34 Jeune Afrique (2020). Mali: M5-RFP coalition rejects transition charter adopted by junta. www.theafricareport.com/41590/mali-m5-rfp, accessed on 2 September 2023.

35 Limo, I. (2017). Mediation in Africa. *ACCORD Conflict Trends 2017/2*

36 Limo, I. (2017). Mediation in Africa. *ACCORD Conflict Trends 2017/2*

37 Points from the Discussions during the MSN meeting in Accra, Ghana. See the "Mediating Complex Conflicts: Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Approach in a Changing World Order" Keynote Address by Mr. Emmanuel Bombande, UN Senior Mediation Adviser, United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

38 The Mali sanction regime was established in 2017 which allows the UN to impose travel bans and asset freezes on anyone violating or obstructing the 2015 peace agreement, hindering aid delivery, committing rights abuses, or recruiting child soldiers.

39 Nichols, M. (2023). UN sanctions in Mali to end after Russia blocks renewal. Available at www.reuters.com/world/russia-seeks-end-uns-mali-sanctions-monitoring-2023-08-30, accessed on 6 September 2023.

40 For more information see "Security Council Terminates Mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2690 (2023)" Available at press.un.org/en/2023/SC15341.doc.htm, accessed on 28 August 2023.

41 For more information see "Mali: Vote on Resolution Ending the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali" Available at www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/06/mali-vote-on-resolution-ending-the-un-multidimensional-integrated-stabilization-mission-in-mali.php#:~:text=*Post%2Dscript%3A%20On%2030,9365, accessed on 28 August 2023.

42 Al-Anani, K. (2023). The Sudan Crisis: How Regional Actors' Competing Interests Fuel the Conflict. www.arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-sudan, accessed on 5 September 2023.

states. While the AU and its RECs have demonstrated significant political will and commitment to address conflicts, funding shortfalls have often undermined effective and timely responses to conflicts and crises. Member States' financial contributions have been insignificant.⁴³ As a result, most regional and continental-led mediation processes are funded by external donors, development partners, and intergovernmental institutions like the EU. However, such funding is mostly premised on specific timelines and budgetary allocations. The situation has also led to a high level of donor dependency, which has sometimes undermined the ownership, independence, and legitimacy of the AU and its RECs. The elongation of the multi-stakeholder process and the unreliability of continued funding (renewal of funding) has undermined peace processes and influenced the pace of mediation.⁴⁴

5. Issues of Sovereignty and Internal Divisions Among Member States

Issues of 'respect of sovereignty', internal divisions, political disunity, and conflicting interests among member states of intergovernmental organizations also work to undermine sub-regional and regional peace processes. ECOWAS particularly faces this challenge, with disagreements among its member states on how to handle certain conflict situations in West Africa, which sometimes poses obstacles to effective mediation. A recent case in point is the divisions regarding the planned use of force by ECOWAS to address the political crisis in Niger. Three countries - Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea - are against military intervention and have threatened to withdraw from the regional bloc if war is declared on Niger in a bid to restore constitutional order.⁴⁵ Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso went a step further to sign a collective defense and mutual assistance pact known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on 16 September 2023 to assist one another against possible threats of armed rebellion or external aggression.⁴⁶ The Liptako-Gourma Charter, which established the AES, notably states that "any attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more contracted parties will be considered an aggression against the other parties"⁴⁷.

The fracture within ECOWAS is hindering the bloc's cohesion, cooperation, and coordination needed to

respond to the crisis in Niger. Similarly, within the EU, while countries like France favor the use of force by ECOWAS, others like Italy and Germany are reluctant for a military intervention in Niger. This is due to its potential for negative effects on development and economic progress in the Sahel region as well as possible mass displacement and irregular migration to Europe.⁴⁸ The lack of regional and international consensus and differing interests has weakened the peace process in Niger.

6. Lack of Clear Frameworks or Modalities for Cooperation and Coordination

The multi-stakeholder approach is expected to have an operational framework that defines the roles, responsibilities, and working modalities of the various stakeholders involved in the mediation process. However, most of the multi-stakeholder processes led by the AU and its RECs do not have any clear frameworks for collaboration and coordination of mediation interventions. They are mostly loose frameworks of collaboration without any specific standard operating procedures to inform the working relationships and roles of the different stakeholders. For this reason, external actors are mostly invited to be part of and contribute to the mediation process without any clearly defined roles. This makes the multi-stakeholder process less structured and systematic and prevents effective coordination of actions and interventions in achieving a common goal. In addition, the lack of clear frameworks for collaboration and coordination has a risk of prolonging mediation due to "factors such as competition among actors, lack of timely decision-making, and initiation of parallel mediation processes".⁴⁹

43 African Union. (2022). African Union Peace Fund: Board of Trustees convene Meeting to Review Progress on Operationalization. Available at www.au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/41980-pr-PEACE_FUND_PR.pdf, accessed on 5 September 2023.

44 Eze, B. C. (2019). Mediating Complex Community Conflicts in Africa: Connecting Research to Peacebuilding. *African Peacebuilding Network APN Lecture Series: No. 5*.

45 For more information see "Niger coup deepens divisions in West Africa economic bloc" Available at en.majalla.com/node/297191/business-economy/niger-coup-deepens-divisions-west-africa-economic-bloc, accessed on 7 September 2023.

46 Africanews (2022). Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso sign mutual defence pact. Available at www.africanews.com/2023/09/17/mali-niger-burkina-faso-sign-mutual-defence-pact, accessed on 8 September 2023.

47 Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso sign Sahel security pact. *Reuters*. 16 September 2023.

48 For more information see "Niger coup deepens divisions in West Africa economic bloc" Available at en.majalla.com/node/297191/business-economy/niger-coup-deepens-divisions-west-africa-economic-bloc, accessed on 7 September 2023.

49 Omar, A. S. (2023). Time Matters: External Actors' Involvement and Duration of Regional Organizations Mediation Process – A Qualitative Study of the Mediation Process in Madagascar and Kenya. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. Spring 2023.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Multi-stakeholder approaches to mediation have significantly contributed to addressing complex conflicts in Africa. As the nature of conflicts continues to evolve, its relevance, efficacy, and practice will become paramount. In many conflict settings on the continent, the multi-stakeholder approach has become the standard international and regional response mechanism to violent conflicts, with the AU and its RECs like ECOWAS and IGAD playing a leading role in many peace processes, supported by its member states, the UN, EU, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. Some of the strengths and challenges discussed above in this document are summarized below, as well as some of the lessons to be considered for future cases:

Strengths	Challenges
<i>Legitimacy and sustainability:</i> If effective, the joint ownership that comes from a well-designed multi-stakeholder process leads to more legitimate and sustainable outcomes	<i>Operationalization:</i> Hard to operationalize, especially when there is limited inclusivity within peace processes, insufficient funding, strong geopolitical rivalries, a lack of effective coordination/collaboration, and internal divisions
<i>Vertical and horizontal:</i> The multi-stakeholder approach counterbalances elite bargain deals by combining horizontal elite bargain deals with vertical societal agreements	<i>Terminology:</i> Risk of using new terms for old ideas. Clarity of overlap and differences with other terms such as “inclusivity” “participation”, “multi-track” are needed to advance the discussion
<i>Co-mediation:</i> If roles are clear, co-mediation and team peacemaking efforts counterbalance the risk of single “one-man” mediation efforts.	<i>Leadership:</i> Lack of clear leadership can lead to blockages, or working at cross purposes.

Lessons:

- *Terms:* Clarify meaning of terms
- *Principles:* Agree early on to the principles the practice seeks to live up to (e.g. subsidiarity)
- *Analysis:* Seek a minimal level of analysis sharing, even if competition does not allow for joint action of third parties
- *Purpose:* Work to clarify the goal of the peace process shared by all the stakeholders, that is the yardstick against which peacemaking and peacebuilding is measured
- *Framework:* Clarify the processes to deal with third party competition early on in a process or establish a common framework
- *Timeframe:* Organize tasks in a timeframe, to be clear as to what is to be done when, and by whom
- *Funding:* requires predictable funding to sustain the peace process until a negotiated settlement is reached and implemented
- *Professionalization:* there is a need for professionals or MSUs to provide technical support to appointed mediators, envoys, or high-level panels.

The ECOWAS and the AU-led mediation efforts in Mali and Ethiopia respectively highlight the importance of the multi-stakeholder approach, where different actors and their initiatives complement each other to ensure effective coherence, coordination, and collaboration in resolving conflicts. Both cases have demonstrated how the AU and ECOWAS's working relationships with the UN, regional organizations like the EU and IGAD, bilateral partners, and CSOs have helped in mediating and transforming a broad range of conflict issues in Mali and Ethiopia – even if the conflicts are far from fully resolved. The multi-stakeholder process has not only synchronized the actions and coherence of responses among various stakeholders, but it has also sometimes led to synergies needed to transform conflicts and build sustainable peace in Africa. However, despite the modest successes, challenges remain and have been identified (see table above). To further exploit the potential of the multi-stakeholder approach on the continent, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **Promote Effective Coordination and Collaboration:** The multi-stakeholder peace processes led by ECOWAS and the AU in Mali and Ethiopia were loose frameworks of collaboration without any specific clear-cut roles and responsibilities of the different third parties with timeframes. This made the process less structured and systematic. There is a need for a more systematic, structured, comprehensive, and integrated multi-stakeholder approach to ensure effective collaboration, coordination, and programmatic synergies of interventions between relevant stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and global levels. This will entail having proper operational frameworks and modalities to ensure system-wide coordination and collaboration between stakeholders and to prevent ad hoc or loose frameworks of collaboration.
- **Strengthen the Inclusivity of Peace Processes:** It is important for states, the UN, the AU, and its RECs to prioritize inclusion and the effective participation of all actors, especially the involvement of youth, women, CSOs, and the private sector in all actions geared toward the resolution of conflicts. Efforts should also be made to promote inclusivity in peace processes during violent, political conflicts through constructive engagements and dialogues that emphasize the added value and roles of all relevant parties in the process. This is because research has shown that this strengthens the ownership, effectiveness, quality, sustainability, and implementation of peace agreements. It will also help to effectively mainstream mediation initiatives at different levels of society.
- **Address the issue of inadequate funding through innovative strategies:** Beyond encouraging member states' contributions to the Peace Funds, the AU and its RECs should explore innovative resource mobilization strategies to raise funds from the private sector and the business community on the continent. This will help minimize the overdependence on external funding which sometimes influences the direction

and objectives of mediation processes. Additionally, the AU should continue to explore funding from UN-assessed contributions with accountability mechanisms and clear principles of how funds will be used to ensure predictable, adequate, and sustainable support to its peace processes.

- **Appointment of Mediators, Envoys and High-Level Panels:** To guarantee the neutrality of mediators, envoys and high-level panels and ensure their legitimacy and trust, the UN, AU, and its RECs should always seek mediators who are impartial, command respect at all levels, are experienced in handling complex situations and conversant with the background of the conflict and the complex internal dynamics at play in a conflict context. Additionally, MSUs should promote reliance on professionalized mediation and technical support to mitigate some of the more politicized interventions. However, while the political dimension cannot be completely detached from the mediation processes, having technical and professional support to the appointed mediators, envoys, or high-level panels could help promote more sustainable outcomes for peace processes.

Mediation Support Network

Profile

The Mediation Support Network (MSN) is a small, global network of primarily non-governmental organizations that support mediation in peace negotiations.

Mission

The mission of the MSN is to promote and improve mediation practice, processes, and standards to address political tensions and armed conflict.

Furthermore, the MSN connects different mediation support units and organizations with the intention of:

- promoting exchange on planned and ongoing activities to enable synergies and cumulative impact;
- providing opportunities for collaboration, initiating, and encouraging joint activities;
- sharing analysis of trends and ways to address emerging challenges in the field of peace mediation.

Activities

The MSN meets once a year in different locations. The organization of the meetings rotates, with each meeting hosted by a network partner. Each meeting has a primary topical focus that is jointly decided by all network members.

MSN Members in April 2023

- African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) www.accord.org.za
- Berghof Foundation www.berghof-foundation.org
- The Carter Center www.cartercenter.org
- Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) www.hdcentre.org
- Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org
- Center for Peace Mediation (CPM) www.peacemediation.de
- Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – Programa por la Paz (CINEP) www.cinep.org.co
- Clingendael Academy www.clingendael.org
- CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation: www.cmi.fi

- Conciliation Resources (CR) www.c-r.org
- CSSP Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation (CSSP) www.cssp-mediation.org
- Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) <https://fba.se/en>
- The Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT): www.ifit-transitions.org
- Mediation Support Project (MSP), swisspeace and Center for Security Studies (CSS) ETH Zurich www.swisspeace.ch & www.css.ethz.ch
- NOREF Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), www.noref.no
- Ottawa Dialogue, www.ottawadialogue.ca
- Sasakawa Peace Foundation, www.spf.org/en
- Search for Common Ground (SfCG) www.sfcg.org
- Servicios Y Asesoría Para La Paz (SERAPAZ) www.serapaz.org.mx
- Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) www.rep.usm.my/index.php/en/seacsn/about-seacsn
- UN Mediation Support Unit (PMD/MSU) www.peacemaker.un.org/mediation-support
- US Institute of Peace (USIP) www.usip.org
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) www.wanep.org
- Zimbabwe Institute (ZI) www.zimbabweinstitute.net

Previous MSN Discussion Points:

MSN Discussion Points no.11. *Peace Mediation and Diplomacy: Joining Forces for More Effective Cooperation*, 2022

MSN Discussion Points no. 10. *Implementing Peace Agreements: Supporting the Transition from the Negotiation Table to Reality*, 2020

MSN Discussion Points no. 9, *Translating Mediation Guidance into Practice: Commentary on the Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies*, 2017

MSN Discussion Points no. 8, *Encountering and Countering Temporary Impasses in Peace Processes*, 2016

MSN Discussion Points no. 7, *Challenges to Mediation Support in Hot Wars: Learnings from Syria and Ukraine*, 2015



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